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On the Day of Common Prayer (Rome, May 10, 2003)

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Rome, May 10, 2003

To the members of the Vincentian Family

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you!

We are writing to you today, as we do each year, to begin the preparation process for our annual day of prayer, held around September 27. The evaluations of this common day of prayer, which now takes place in almost all the countries where the Vincentian Family exists, have been very positive.

Last year on September 27, as you recall, we distributed the new prayer card of our Vincentian Family, encouraging our members to use this prayer often, even daily. The response has been enormous. The card has been translated into many languages. We calculate that about a million copies have been printed. It appears that, in a few places, the prayer card remains unknown. We ask you to continue distributing it and using it.

As you begin to prepare for this year's celebration, several pieces of information may be helpful to you.

1. At our annual meeting of the heads of some of the principal branches of the Vincentian Family, on February 7-9, we decided to extend for another year the campaign that we have been engaged in since September 27, 2001, entitled: "The Globalization of Charity: The Fight Against Hunger." We made this decision because the response to this campaign has been wonderfully enthusiastic. Hundreds of projects have been begun, encompassing all the continents. Information about these can be found on our web site (www.famvin.org). In this third year of the campaign, as you design further projects or modify those already being engaged in, we encourage you to accent three characteristics:
 - a. that the projects move in the direction of combatting the causes of poverty;
 - b. that, wherever possible, they involve the various branches of the Vincentian Family, working collaboratively;
 - c. that those toward whom the projects are directed (the poor) be involved in the process of designing them, carrying them out, and evaluating them.

2. This year at our meeting in February we also decided, for the first time in our history, to unite our energies as a Vincentian Family in a common “political action” aimed at the eradication of malaria. Besides affecting many members of our own Family in Africa, Asia and Latin America, malaria has devastating effects in the lives of countless others throughout the world. There are more than 300 million acute cases of malaria each year globally, resulting in more than a million deaths. About 90% of these deaths occur in Africa, mostly in young children. Malaria is Africa’s leading cause of death for those under five years of age. But it is quite possible to combat it actively, to diminish its effects gradually, and even eventually to wipe it out (a success that has already been achieved in a number of countries). What is lacking is the “political will,” and the corresponding financial support. In other words, governments often have other interests and establish other priorities for the use of their money.

The goal of a “political action” campaign is to express the views of our Vincentian Family clearly, with a united voice, to those who have power and the economic resources needed to effect a change.

In the concrete, this could mean, on an international level, that our Family would:

- ask our offices at the UN in New York and the European Community in Belgium to identify the appropriate political groups that should be contacted (the UN itself, the European Community itself, other bodies, various national governments);
- draft a united statement describing who we are and what we ask in regard to the eradication of malaria;
- send this united statement to the appropriate political bodies;
- encourage all our members to send similar statements.

On the national and local levels, in the concrete, this would mean that each branch in each country would devise its own strategy. Such strategies would be relevant even in countries that are malaria-free (e.g., the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, etc.), since these countries have powerful political influence and huge economic resources.

To offer further information about this “political action” to the members of our Vincentian Family and to make practical suggestions about how to engage in it, we have named a committee. Its members are: Fr. Benjamín Romo, C.M., Sr. Marie Raw, D.C., Mrs. Rosa de Lima Ramanankavana,

AIC, Mr. Marco Bétemps, SSVP, Fr. Marc-André Couture, RSVP, Edurne Urdampilleta, JMV, Mr. Ramiro Gutiérrez Ruiz, AMM, María Jesús Cuena, MISEVI. They will be in contact with you during the course of the year.

3. At the celebration of the Eucharist (or other forms of celebration) on September 27, 2003, we suggest that the theme be: HUNGER and that both the continuation of the campaign against hunger and the initiation of the new “political action” campaign against malaria be announced. For your convenience, a sheet containing some practical guidelines and suggestions is enclosed, as usual.

We encourage you to make this day of common prayer a time when our minds and hearts are united with the Lord, with each other, and with the poor whom we serve. A great English poet once wrote: “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.” St. Vincent was deeply convinced of this. It is through prayer, he wrote, “that all good things come to us ... if we succeed in our work, it is thanks to prayer. If we do not fall into sin, it is thanks to prayer. If we remain in charity and if we are saved, all that happens thanks to God and thanks to prayer. Just as God refuses nothing to prayer, so also he grants almost nothing without prayer” (SV XI, 407).

Anne Sturm
President, AIC (founded in 1617)

Yvon Laroche, rsv
Superior General, Religious of
St. Vincent de Paul (founded in 1845)

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General, Congregation of the
Mission (founded in 1625)

Gladys Abi-Saïd
President, Vincentian
Marian Youth (founded in 1847)

Sr. Juana Elizondo, D.C.
Superior General, Daughters of
Charity (founded in 1633)

Charles Shelby, C.M.
International Coordinator of the
Miraculous Medal Association
(founded in 1909)

José Ramón Díaz Torremocha
President, St. Vincent de Paul
Society (founded in 1833)

Eva Villar
President, MISEVI
(founded in 1999)

GUIDELINES FOR SEPTEMBER 27, 2003

1. The heads of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, AIC, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, JMV, MISEVI, the Miraculous Medal Association, and the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul in each city or area should meet as soon as possible in order to begin to plan the prayer celebration. After receiving this letter, would you please contact one another by phone or other suitable means as soon as possible. To facilitate this matter, we ask the superior of the Congregation of the Mission in each area to initiate these contacts. If there are no members of the Congregation of the Mission in the area, then we ask the superior of the Daughters of Charity to be the initiator.
2. Please invite the other branches of the Vincentian Family in your area to join in this celebration (e.g., other groups of laity, sisters, brothers, or priests living in the Vincentian spirit). It is especially important that the young feel at home at our celebrations. Our gathering can be an opportune moment for them to know men and women who share St. Vincent's vision.
3. We encourage you too to provide for the participation of the poor, who evangelize us by their presence.
4. The day of prayer could include a common celebration of the Eucharist or some other communal service, according to the circumstances in each area. If a Mass is not possible, one might envision a celebration of the word, with readings, hymns, prayers, sharing of thoughts, etc. In other contexts, one could envision a "Holy Hour," with the usual liturgical actions (processions, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, readings, etc.). A sheet is attached, with suggestions concerning the theme.
5. During the celebration, the prayer of the Vincentian Family, distributed last year, could be said together. All could be encouraged to use the prayer frequently, even daily.
6. One could also organize, depending on the circumstances, a moment for ongoing formation and/or for relaxed social contact.
7. The celebration should be organized on or around September 27, in accord with what date would best promote the participation of the various members of our family. It is important that the celebration be truly communal, with the active participation of members of the various branches. A wise distribution of roles will guarantee that all groups take part.

8. Any of the readings suggested for the Mass of St. Vincent may be used (cf. Lectionary of the Congregation of the Mission), along with, if you judge it helpful, other appropriate selections from St. Vincent's writings. Much will depend on the kind of celebration that is organized in each area. A prayer of the faithful should be prepared with intentions contributed by members of the various branches of the Vincentian Family.
9. In order to raise consciousness about our annual day of prayer, about our campaign against hunger, and about the new "political action" campaign against malaria, we suggest the following:
 - a. the use of various media to publicize them: articles in the press, announcements on the radio, television, etc.
 - b. the use of our international, national, and local web pages to publicize them.
10. We hope that, around September 27, our Family in each country, might evaluate the projects that have been organized for the Campaign Against Hunger, and, if it seems opportune, initiate others, using the three criteria described above in the letter.

VINCENTIAN FAMILY DAY OF PRAYER
September 27, 2003

Suggested Theme: Hunger

We hope that some of the following information will be helpful as you prepare this day.

I. Hunger: Do we know the facts?

It is estimated that one billion people in the world suffer from hunger and malnutrition. That is roughly 100 times as many as those who actually die from these causes each year.

About 24,000 people die every day from hunger or hunger-related causes. This is down from 35,000 ten years ago, and 41,000 twenty years ago. Three-fourths of the deaths are children under the age of five.

Famine and wars cause about 10% of hunger deaths, although these tend to be the ones we hear about most often. The majority of hunger deaths are caused by chronic malnutrition. Families facing extreme poverty are simply unable to get enough food to eat.

Chronic hunger causes various illnesses:

- impaired vision
- impaired functioning of the immune system (which means increased susceptibility to disease)
- stunted growth or developmental difficulties.

II. Scripture Readings

- Deuteronomy 15:7-11
- Isaiah 58:5-11
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
- Matthew 25:31-46

III. Healing Hunger: a two-part approach

1. *Provide food immediately.*
Hunger demands of us an immediate response, as St. Vincent and his followers often demonstrated. Without our immediate response, people starve and die.

2. Attack causes of hunger.

The number of deaths caused by starvation has decreased almost by half in the past 20 years; education points the way to ending hunger together.

IV. This year's "political action" campaign against malaria: some information that may be helpful.

- Malaria is caused by a deadly mosquito which is becoming increasingly resistant to the drugs that combat malaria.
- Each year there are at least 300 million acute cases of malaria globally.
- A million people die of malaria annually.
- Ninety percent of the deaths occur in Africa, mostly in young children.
- Malaria is Africa's leading cause of mortality for those under five years of age.
- Malaria-related deaths can be reduced very significantly by rather simple means:
 - ▶ insuring that people sleep under insecticide-treated nets (this can reduce, by up to one-third, the death of those under five years of age);
 - ▶ prompt recognition and effective treatment (this means that effective, affordable anti-malaria drugs must be made available to those living in malaria-affected areas).
- Government-funded programs can reduce malaria-related deaths dramatically over a relatively brief period of time.

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